

VZCZCXYZ3277
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSK #0153/01 0631549
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 031549Z MAR 08
FM AMEMBASSY MINSK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6983
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 1858
RUEHBS/USMISSION USEU 0293
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

C O N F I D E N T I A L MINSK 000153

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/03/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [BO](#)
SUBJECT: OPPOSITION COALITION'S CANDIDATE LIST NEARS
COMPLETION

REF: A. MINSK 073

[1](#)B. 07 MINSK 1006

Classified By: Ambassador Karen Stewart for reason 1.4 (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) The United Democratic Forces (UDF) coalition at long last looks set to finalize its list of potential candidates for parliamentary elections due in September. At the same time the UDF would still consider opening up slots to nationally known opposition figures who as of yet refuse to compete as part of the unified slate of candidates. The most notable opposition holdout, Aleksandr Milinkevich, still appears determined not to run for parliament. End summary.

UDF Agrees Upon Over 95 Percent of Candidates

[1](#)2. (C) Media reported that the UDF agreed upon 50 more parliamentary candidates for the coalition's unified list at its March 2 Political Council session. Most of the newly approved candidates hail from the contentious regions of Grodno and Mogilyov oblasts (ref A) as well as from Brest and Minsk oblasts, where disputes over a few districts held up approvals of entire lists. The total number of confirmed candidates now stands at 106 of a total of 110 districts. UDF Co-Chair and United Civic Party (UCP) Leader Anatoliy Lebedko told Acting DCM that the remaining regions would hold caucuses March 9 and March 10 to determine their candidates.

List Includes Veteran Opposition Leaders

[1](#)3. (C) The names announced largely coincide with those included on earlier draft lists of candidates. One prominent exception, Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) and For Freedom Movement (FF) Deputy Head Yuriy Gubarevich, who will represent Bereza in Brest oblast, was made possible after the leadership questions within BPF were resolved (ref B). In several districts where multiple candidates vied for the nod, the UDF opted for those with opposition leadership experience by picking two UCP Deputy Heads (Yaroslav Romanchuk and Lyudmila Gryaznova) and the party's Grodno oblast chair, Yuriy Istomin.

[1](#)4. (C) While most candidates represent the four largest UDF parties -- BPF, UCP, Belarusian Social Democracy Party - Gramada, and Belarusian Party of Communists - representatives of other parties and movements, such as Belarusian Christian Democracy and Malady Front, are present on the list as well.

Door Still Open for Holdout "VIPs" to Join Unified List

15. (C) Lebedko said the UDF would still consider offering spots in Minsk to those who held themselves up as potential national leaders (namely Aleksandr Milinkevich, Stanislav Shushkevich, Vladimir Novosyad and Aleksandr Yaroshuk), provided they agreed to campaign under the UDF platform. Lebedko suggested in any case some candidates would drop out in the face of likely GOB pressure, providing natural openings for newcomers. Lebedko argued that voters would take voting seriously only if politicians did not act as though the elections were already lost.

"For Freedom" Still Sowing Dissension

16. (C) Rather than accept the UDF leadership's offer to join the campaign at the last minute, Milinkevich designated his assistant, Aleksandr Logvinets, to make an open challenge to Lebedko to face him in a primary vote. With nearly the whole list decided, Lebedko told A/DCM he viewed the action as a stunt designed to justify Milinkevich's longstanding decision to boycott elections, and to cast doubt upon the legitimacy of the UDF's unified list. He asked A/DCM rhetorically why Logvinets announced his desire to run for office only after the UDF Minsk list was complete.

Comment: Making It Hard on Lukashenko

17. (C) Both Lebedko and those who doubt the efficacy of participating in the parliamentary elections, most notably Milinkevich, fully believe authorities will not allow a free and fair election. Lebedko's call to campaign to win, and to prepare to protest results in the most clearly stolen races, stands the best chance of reaching the masses this year and of preparing the opposition for presidential elections under less than ideal conditions in 2011.

STEWART